

they are likely to give, may ultimately turn out to be of little use. There is no doubt, however, that the pointed letters, some of which resemble the V and E of the English alphabet, must belong to a very ancient age, and it would be interesting to trace the people who engraved them. The letters are big and deeply cut.

Tradition attributes the rocks on the Mundeśvari hill to a Daitya, by the name of Munda. He was the brother of Chanda, the chief who founded Chyápur. They belonged to a race of Pre-Aryans, who must have latterly blended their own worship of the phallus with that of the Saktí. The remains of their forts and stone buildings incontestably point out that the Daityas, who at times established sovereign sway over the Aryans, were not mere savages. Hated and dreaded as their names may appear, they were certainly powerful princes who represented a more advanced state of civilization than history has yet been ready to assign them. The history of these primitive races, detested by the names of Dákas, Daityas, Dasyus, the raw-eaters and the "Black race", remains yet to be written, and in the relics of their ruined forts, temples, pillars, scattered along the plains and hills of Sháhábád and the valleys along the Ganges, some material may be gathered to show that they were not entirely men of that degraded condition in which their antagonists have invariably depicted them. Mr. Thomason's remarks regarding the Bhar tribe equally apply to the other aborigines of the district: "They were a powerful and industrious people, as is evident by the large works they have left behind them."

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*Note on the old Manipuri Character.*—By G. H. DAMANT, C. S., *Officiating Political Agent, Manipur.*

(With two plates.)

There can be but little doubt that this alphabet is a form of the Devanágari, and it was in all probability introduced from Bengal along with Hinduism by some wandering sanyási in the reign of Charairongba, who flourished about 1700 A. D.; at least there is no evidence to show that a knowledge of writing existed among the Manipuris at any earlier date. The earliest MS. I can find, purports to have been composed in the reign of Charairongba, and there are no mural inscriptions of old date in the country. The alphabet is singularly ill-adapted to the Manipuri language, and in point of fact, we find in the MSS. that the letters *g, gh, chh, j, jh*, all the gutturals, *ñ d, dh, b, bh, ç*, and *sh* are seldom, if ever, used except in words of Bengali origin, *k, t, p*, and *ch* being used for *g, d, b*, and *j* respectively, while

*w*, a letter which distinctly exists in the Manipuri language, is unrepresented in the alphabet. Compound letters are seldom used or required.

The most important MS. is called the “*Tákhelgnamba*”, and contains an account of the wars between Pamhaiba, *alias* Garib-Namaz, [Gharíb-nawáz] king of Manipur and the Rájá of Tiparah. The copy in my possession contains 45 leaves written on both sides.

The next in importance is the “*Samsokgnamba*”, which is a history of the war between Charairongba and his son Pamhaiba of Manipur and the kings of Burma and Sumjok. It contains 36 leaves.

The “*Lânglol*,” a short MS. of ten leaves only, is a treatise on morals, intermixed with proverbs and maxims, and would probably be interesting as throwing light on the customs of the Manipuris before their conversion to Hinduism. The only other MSS. of which I have been able to obtain information, are the “*Meiyánggnamba*”, an account of the wars between Manipur and Kachár, and the “*Salkau*”, a treatise on cattle and the respect to be shown them. Of these two latter I have not been able to obtain copies. The above seem to comprise the whole literature of Manipur; but it is just possible that further search may reveal one or two other works. The MSS. are all written on a coarse, but very durable, kind of paper, with pens made of bamboo; paper blackened with charcoal on which they write with a soapstone pencil is also used. The character has now been almost entirely superseded by Bengali, and indeed but few of the Manipuris can read it. A national chronicle is, however, still kept in the old character by the guild of priests, ‘maibees’ as they are called, in which every event of importance occurring in the country is regularly recorded.

The language of the MSS. is most difficult, being quite unintelligible to an ordinary Manipuri, while those who can understand it are very few in number. It is, however, interesting as being the oldest form we possess of the Manipuri and cognate dialects. In a practically unwritten language like this, for the very few writings which exist could never have affected the mass of the people, considerable variations in dialect must inevitably take place in the course of a very few years; but in the present instance the difference between the written and spoken language is so great, that it can hardly be accounted for in this way. Tradition has it, and it seems most probable, that the Manipuris are a conglomeration of several distinct tribes, and it may well be that these MSS. are written in the dialect of one of them, whichever may have been predominant at the time, but this is a question which can only be satisfactorily settled after careful enquiry.

I subjoin a copy of the complete Manipuri alphabet, and a facsimile with transliteration and translation of the first page of the “*Samsokgnamba*.” The translation is little more than tentative, as the meaning of many phrases is obscure and doubtful, the Manipuris themselves differing very much as to their meaning.

*Translation.*

Hail O King, hail lord of heaven, hail *snake*\* king, slayer of kings, O mighty king, snake king at whose voice the people flee, who has performed the works of a king, who has conquered ten camps of Burmese, with body and soul I will sing of *Selbi*,† *Samsok*‡ and the villages conquered last month. Hail to *his*§ father, king Charairongba, who changed the names of the gods, who warred in *Selbi* and *Tekhau*,|| who subdued in war the *Lolloitha*,¶ who ascended the throne in the sight of all the people, *who was related to the Burmese*\*\* and brought the *Poerai*†† into connection with them. I will tell how his daughter Chakpa Makhau Gnambi the *lady*‡‡ of royal family was given in marriage. Tongtoi, the king of Burma, gave order, Go my servants, you Mayangkong of *Selbi* the wise, and you Tunglacha of Burma the mighty, go both of you to *Poerai*.

\* The word 'lairel' is still used to signify a snake. It probably refers to Pakungba, the tutelary deity of the kings of Manipur, which is said to appear in that form, small if pleased, and of great size if angry.

† Kubbo.

‡ Sumjok.

§ This refers to Pamhaiba, *alias* Garíb Namáz, the son of Charairongba, who died at the commencement of the war.

|| Asám.

¶ Said to be a tribe of Nágás, but I cannot identify them.

\*\* *i. e.* by giving his daughter Chakpa Makhau Gnambi in marriage to the king of Burma.

†† The people of Manipur.

‡‡ The word I have translated "lady" is "Tampa", it is a title applied to females of royal descent.

